DROWNING IN MINOR DETAILS

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INTRODUCTION

Praise be to Allah; we praise Him, seek His forgiveness, and turn to Him in repentance. We seek refuge with Him from the evils of our souls and the evils of our deeds. Whomever Allah guides, none can misguide, and whomever Allah leads astray, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah alone without partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.

Over-emphasizing minor details has been a negative aspect of contemporary Muslim life for decades. It is not merely an affliction affecting one aspect of life, and it is not merely a mistake made by those engaged in Islamic work. It is a mistake that Muslims fall victim to in every aspect of their lives, without exception. Muslims are overly concerned with minor details in everything that matters to them. This excessive concern for the details has caused them to neglect issues of universal importance and lose sight of the fundamentals.

If we take Islamic work and the spreading Islamic knowledge as a case in point, we find that the efforts being made in this area are fragmented and disorganized. This work is taken up by individuals who are seeking a reward with their Lord. Each one of them works according to what he feels to be important and to the level and extent of his abilities. There is almost no framework for the activities of Islamic workers and scholars. There are no clear guidelines to help them prioritize matters according to their importance so that the appropriate amount of concern can be given to each issue and so that nothing will be neglected on the account of something else.

We are in desperate need for someone to tell us that this is major and that is minor, that this is a fundamental concern and that is of secondary importance, that this is important but that is more important, that this we shall do today and that can be put off until tomorrow. We almost never hear statements like these. Each one of us has his own things that he is concerned with: possibly Islamic Law, possibly economics, politics, or administration. We find that whatever a person may be involved in, he never seems to ask whether his emphasis is correct or whether it would be better for him to direct his efforts towards something else that might be more productive.

The Importance of this Topic:

Some Muslims – even some Islamic workers – have turned all of their attentions to subsidiary issues and their particular details. They spend their nights and waste their days tearing these issues apart and arguing about them, as if those issues are everything that the religion entails. The issue at hand is often merely a voluntary *Sunnah* act that

someone might leave off without incurring any sin or blame, though it is admittedly best for a Muslim to follow Allah's Messenger in all matters great and small.

In total contrast to these people, there is another group who claim that they can rectify this situation by neglecting all the particulars and details. They consider all these details to be banalities. Some have called them: "worthless trivialities that no one should pay attention to." The particulars of the religion have unfortunately become the butt of jokes and derision among some Islamic workers and intellectuals.

As for us, we say that all of these matters, great and small, are part of the faith. Everything that relates to Islam, the fundamentals together with the particulars, makes up our religion. There is a well-known *hadîth* where Jibrîl (the angel Gabriel, peace be upon him) comes to Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) to ask him about piety, faith, and Islam. He also asks him about a number of particular matters – in some narrations of the *hadîth* – like the lesser pilgrimage (*`umrah*) and the ritual bath (*ghusl*). In spite of this, when Jibrîl had departed, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "That was Jibrîl coming to teach you your religion."[1]

Everything that Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) came with is our religion, and we should be concerned about it. It should never become an object of jest or mockery. No one who acts upon it should be criticized. At the same time, everything should be given the amount of attention that it warrants, and the relative importance of everything must be taken into consideration.

It is amazing to see that some of the Islamic workers who claim to be striving for change and reform are the very people who are causing others to delve too deeply into the particulars. These reformers are often the ones distracting people from more important matters. They accomplish this by putting forth their opinions in a provocative and non-objective manner. Perhaps the clearest example of this is what one intellectual wrote for a daily newspaper. In bold type it read: "**There is no proof in the *Qur'ân* or the *Sunnah* that a woman should cover her face**." If such an issue is presented in this manner, then it is no wonder that all sorts of criticism and objections should pour forth and that so much attention should be given to this issue. It is wrong for a person to offer his opinion on a particular matter, then when someone else comes along with a conflicting opinion, say: "These are mere details, banalities and trivialities."

Sound research and strong evidence must be the guiding principles for everyone. We do not criticize anyone for discussing matters of religion, but that person should speak rationally, objectively, and with proper evidence from the *Qur'ân*, *Sunn*ah, or *Ijmâ`* (Consensus). Likewise, these matters should be discussed according to their importance and the weight that they carry.

[1] Ibn Abî Shaybah (30429). Also Dâraqutnî (207) with the phrase "and to take a bath from major ritual impurity". The *hadîth* was related by Ibn `Umar. Al-Dâraqutnî comments: "This chain of transmission is authentic (*sahîh*)." The basis for this *hadîth* is in Bukhârî (50) as related by Abû Hurayrah, and Muslim (8) related by `Umar, both without mention of the bath.

This topic of this treatise is one that needs to be addressed. Our purpose is to confront two extreme and opposing tendencies: the tendency to focus only on particulars and minor details and the tendency to see such details as being of no consequence. This topic is not only relevant to Islamic workers. It is an issue of importance for all Muslims. If you were to go to a man in his home, you would see that he is concerned with certain particulars while neglecting other matters of general importance. You would find the same situation if you went to an administrator, teacher, Islamic activist, economist, or politician while he is engaged in his work.

Therefore, excessive concern for minor details to the detriment of primary concerns is a deep-rooted affliction of Muslim life. But before it could become a problem of Muslim life, it first had to become deep-rooted in the Muslim mindset.

In the chapters that follow, we shall try to cover this important topic. Our discussion will be organized under the following headings:

Chapter One: Primary and secondary matters.

Chapter Two: Examples and cases.

Chapter Three: Solutions.

Conclusion

CHAPTER ONE
Primary and Secondary Matters

Without doubt, one thing that we need is to have religious issues categorized into fundamental and secondary matters. You might alternatively say: generalities and particulars. We do not mean here by fundamentals and particulars what is commonly understood: that the fundamentals are the issues related to beliefs and theoretical concerns while the particulars are the issues related to deeds and actions. Instead, when we refer here to fundamentals, we mean issues of great and sweeping importance in matters of both belief and action, and when we talk about particulars, we mean the minute details of beliefs and deeds. *Sheikh al-Islâm* Ibn Taymiyah refers to this breakdown in the great compilation of his writings entitled *Majmû` al-Fatâwâ*.[2]

For example, knowledge of the major obligatory acts of worship, like the five pillars of Islam, is counted among the fundamental issues. This includes ritual purification, prayer, charity, fasting, the *Hajj* pilgrimage, and – before all else – the testimony of faith. All of these issues are clearly related to a Muslim’s deeds, but they are matters of fundamental importance. For this reason, a person who rejects the obligatory nature of any of these deeds becomes an unbeliever on account of this rejection. He is no different than one who rejects any major, established tenet of faith, like – for example – a person who rejects Allah’s power or knowledge or the idea that He is All-Seeing and All-Hearing, or like a

[2] Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmû` al-Fatâwâ* (6/56).

person who rejects any of the other articles of faith mentioned by the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Matters pertaining to deeds:

In these matters we find both fundamental and subsidiary issues. Take prayer for instance. It is a fundamental matter, no doubt, but the preferable acts that can be performed as part of it are subsidiary matters. They are details and particulars. It is possible to spend all of our time discussing one particular detail of prayer – like whether one should sit for a moment after prostrating before standing up again or how one's feet should be placed while sitting or whether the hands or the knees should touch the ground first when going into prostration. Is it, though, wise to do so? Should we spend our lives doting over these issues, researching them, and writing numerous books about them? Should they be our topic of discussion when we sit in the company of others? Should we allow these things to become the cause of enmity and competition between colleagues and between students?

Students of knowledge deal with these issues. They are handed down from one generation of students to the next. Yet, we almost never find anyone speaking to the people about the importance of prayer and its noble status in Islam. We never hear anything that can move the people's hearts and inspire them to take themselves to the mosque for all of their prayers. We also do not find anyone speaking about humility in prayer, though humility is the heart and soul of prayer. On the contrary, we find scholars of Islamic Law saying that humility is a desired quality of prayer, but it is not obligatory! This is in spite of the fact that a prayer that is devoid of humility and presence of mind is a prayer that has no effect on a person whatsoever. It cannot inspire God-consciousness. This being said, we admit that such a prayer is still legally valid, so long as nothing is committed that can nullify it.

We have established, then, that matters related to deeds can be either fundamental or subsidiary.

Matters of belief:

These matters can also be divided into fundamental and subsidiary issues. Take, for instance, the six articles of faith that every small child must learn about in school: belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and divine decree. These are fundamental matters in which there can be no doubt. To deny them is unbelief. Discussion of these matters is so important that it should take precedence over everything else.

At the same time, there are matters of belief that are subsidiary, matters that we can be sure a person will not be asked about in the grave and that are not a condition for entering Paradise. For example: On the night of the Prophet's ascension, did he or did he not see Allah? Will the Hellfire ever cease to exist or will it go on forever? These are not the fundamental matters that the Prophet (peace be upon him) discussed in such

unambiguous terms that any disagreement about them would take a person into unbelief, heresy, or iniquity. These are matters of belief that can easily be categorized as secondary or subordinate.

We can say for sure that a person will not be asked in the grave: Do you believe that the Hellfire will come to an end? And we can be equally sure that his entry into Paradise will not be contingent on his opinion regarding this matter. Yet, that person should believe in the six articles of faith, one of which is belief in the Last Day and what it contains like Paradise and Hell. This belief cannot be mere lip service. It must be a conviction in the heart, one that will affect that person's conduct and deeds. It should give that person the patience and resolve needed to traverse the difficult path of faith and to strive in the cause of Allah. It should make that person prefer what is permanent in the Hereafter to the fleeting pleasures of this life.

There are general matters of belief as well as particular ones. This fact should be perfectly clear. We can all recognize with our common sense that issues can be fundamental or subsidiary, general or particular, and that some issues are more important than others. Moreover, we must know that this fact is not limited to the matters that we have been discussing.

Worldly Matters:

What we have been saying is true for mundane matters as well. If we take a look at the human body, we can see that it is made of parts and systems. The body has a heart, a brain, a respiratory system, and a digestive system. The body cannot afford to dispense with any of these things under any circumstances. There are other parts of the body, however, like fingers and toes. If one finger or toe of the body is cut off, the person remains alive and healthy. As anyone can plainly see, these parts are not as important as the heart, the brain, or the digestive system.

This fact is recognized by Islamic Law as much as it is recognized by medicine and by common sense, for if one person willfully and maliciously cuts off the finger of another, or breaks off his fingernail, his punishment will not be the same as if he causes another to go deaf or blind. This does not mean that the person's finger should not be taken seriously, but it does mean that the finger will not carry the same weight as, say, the person's heart.

Everything should be given the consideration it deserves. Issues must be weighed against each other properly. We must recognize when something is major and when it is minor. We must differentiate between what is important …and what is even more important.

Let us look at another example. Take a city like Riyadh. There are some necessities that its inhabitants cannot do without, like drinking water, clean air, food, and certain consumer goods that are required on a daily basis. A person cannot live without food, drink, or air. These things, therefore, are necessities. In contrast to these, there are secondary matters, like parks, sidewalks, and urban beautification. These things should

definitely not be neglected, but they should never be given precedence over more important matters. If all of these needs can be met – the procurement of food, water and clean air as well as the more critical matters of faith and morality – and we can also achieve beautification, clean streets, and tidy parks, then all the better. On the other hand, if it is not possible for us to achieve all of these goals, then we must start with what is most important. We must secure the necessities of life first. If the other matters can be dealt with afterwards, well and good, but if we cannot address them today, then they can wait for tomorrow.

This concept, then, applies to both religious and worldly affairs. By dividing matters into fundamentals and details, we are not trying to say that the details can be ignored or neglected. What we are saying is that both fundamentals and details should be given their due, but more consideration must be given to fundamentals.

We are calling to two things:

1. Concern for all matters, primary and secondary, because all are part of the religion.
2. Giving each matter only the attention that it deserves, so that no secondary matter will be given the concern of a primary one, and no fundamental issue will be treated like a subsidiary one.

We can see this clearly in the meanings of the sacred texts. When you read the *Qur'ân*, you hear verses of great emotional effect that strike at the heart and bring tears to the eyes. These verses come repeating the same meanings over and over again. There is scarcely a page of the *Qur'ân* that does not talk about the Hereafter, the Resurrection, and the Judgment. Yet, how much do Islamic workers, scholars, and reformers stress these issues? We can say without any reservation that they spend far more time on minor technicalities. We are not exaggerating anything if we say that some Islamic workers spend more time on whether a person should use the fingers of the right hand or both hands when keeping count of his remembrances when glorifying Allah than they do on these important matters that the *Qur'ân* talks about over and over again, matters that are fundamental tenets of belief, that have the power to guide the mind, reform the heart, and move nations.

These great concerns seem to have become good for only one thing – and it is regretful to see how the state of affairs has been turned so upside down – and that is to stress the importance of some subsidiary issue that we are promoting. We try to relate our issue to some important tenet of belief in order to make it seem more important. This relationship that we pose may well be true, and our issue might truly be important, but sometimes we stretch things too far to establish such a relationship where none exists, and we do this only to get the people's attention.

Take, for example, the issue of loyalty and disassociation. It is an issue of general importance that the *Qur'ân* talks about repeatedly. The *Qur'ân* makes very clear to us the

enmity and ill-will that the unbelievers harbor for the Muslims. It also makes it clear that the unbelievers are friends and protectors of each other. Allah says:

"They will not fail to corrupt you. They only desire your ruin: rank hatred has already appeared from their mouths and what their hearts conceal is far worse." [*Sûrah al-`Imrân*: 118]

"O you who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors; they are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them for friendship is one of them." [Sûrah al-Mâ'idah: 51]

"Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with you unless you follow their form of religion." [*Sûrah al-Baqarah*: 120]

"So hearken not to those who deny the truth. Their desire is that you should be pliant so they would be pliant." [*Sûrah al-Qalam*: 8-9]

There is a vast quantity of Qur'anic verses and prophetic *hadîth* that discuss the issue of disassociation from the polytheists and avoiding their way of life.

Allah says: "We have rejected you, and there has arisen between you and us enmity and hatred forever – unless you believe in Allah and Him alone." [*Sûrah al-Mumtahanah*: 4]

Yet, how far is this important concept entrenched in our minds and hearts? How much is it reflected in our discussions and pronouncements? How much exposure do we give this concept and how much are we trying to teach it to the people so that it can become a real and integral part of their lives? Though this concept is of utmost importance, the share of attention that it receives is very small.

We have become oblivious to the danger of the Jews and Christians and the alliance that they have forged with each other today against Islam. They enjoin each other to root the Muslims out, crying: "The Muslims are coming!" We forget the strategic alliance that exists between the United States and Israel and the constant protection that America offers it. We forget how America participated in establishing Israel in the first place and in its subsequent expansion.

Though we forget the danger of the Jews and Christians, we seem to recall it with ease when we want to draw the attention of people to some point that we consider important.

For instance, imagine that you and someone else disagree on a certain point. The issue at hand is one where disagreement is allowed, since there is no clear, unambiguous text in the *Qur'ân* or the *Sunnah* that can decide the matter. It is clear that no one will be asked about this issue in the grave and believing the right position on the matter is not a condition for entering Paradise. Regardless, you have the opportunity to say that the opinion of your disputant is not acceptable and that it has dangerous implications. Then, to drive the point home that such an opinion is dangerous and harmful, you find yourself

compelled to say that your opponent is more dangerous than… and who do you chose? …the Jews and Christians! So now you have used the danger of the Jews and Christians to prove your point. Now, your opponent's position may or may not have dangerous implications, but definitely not to that degree. At the same time, the fundamental issue of allegiance and disassociation that people need to be reminded of and made conscious of – the issue that is more important and more deserving of our emphasis and concern – is, ironically, the one that gets neglected.

For another example, let us look at the issue of Islamic beliefs. Everyone recognizes the importance of beliefs. Beliefs are what moves a person to act. A person cannot do anything without there being some firmly established belief behind it. This is a fact to which even unbelievers admit. If a person's belief is pure and correct, it inspires deeds that are pure and correct. If, on the other hand, a person's belief is corrupt, then it may inspire deeds that are corrupt. Therefore, belief comes first. It is the basis for everything else.

We all speak about Islamic beliefs, but are we doing so in a correct manner? Are we educating the people about these beliefs in the right way? Do we apply them properly and relate our circumstances to them correctly? Or do we sometimes utilize them to express how important or serious some other matter is?

Often, if we want to speak against some idea we try to associate it – correctly or incorrectly – with Islamic beliefs. We say that it goes against our Islamic beliefs in order to warn people against it. We know that if a person feels that something interferes with his beliefs, he will become wary of it and avoid it.

Therefore, the primary goal should be to educate people about their beliefs and make sure that their beliefs and their acts of worship are correct. We should be trying to strengthen their faith in Allah and in His angels, His books, His Messengers, and in the Last Day. Regretfully, though, when we bring up the topic of Islamic beliefs, we often deviate from them without even realizing it.

How, then, should we study Islamic beliefs? The answer to this question should become clear after we consider the following examples:

Example One: When we read the works of our pious predecessors, we find that their approach to presenting Islamic beliefs was to quote the clear Qur'anic verses and authentic *hadîth* that were relevant to the issue at hand. The role that they played as scholars was often merely to provide subject headings for the verses and *hadîth* that they compiled together. This can be seen from their works, like the books that they composed on faith and the oneness of Allah. In this way, Islamic beliefs were available to the people in a clear, easy, and accessible manner. There was no need to force any issues or to make things complicated. There was no need for objection or refutation.

The beliefs that are found in the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah* are pure and quite clear. This was where Abû Bakr, \`Umar, \`Uthmân, and \`Alî got their beliefs from. In fact, this is from

where that simple desert Arab who came out of the wilderness got his beliefs. He sat with Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) for an hour in the morning, and the Prophet (peace be upon him) taught him the fundamentals of belief, faith, and deeds. Then, that desert Arab returned to his people as a Muslim and a believer and called them to Islam. The issues of belief must be made easy. Allah says: "And We have indeed made the *Qur'ân* easy to understand and remember, so is there any who will receive admonition?" [*Sûrah al-Qamar*: 40]

Sometimes we find that a student specializing in Islamic theology – and a student might spend many years in this endeavor – will study logical propositions, philosophical theories, and other problematic matters that take a long time to understand, a long time to discuss, and an equally long time to understand how to refute. Then it often takes an even longer time for the student to become convinced that the refutation is correct. Even then, doubts and misconceptions often linger in the student's heart.

It has been related that *Shaykh al-Islâm* Ibn Taymiyah was approached by Ibn al-Qayyim who questioned him on a number of issues. Ibn Taymiyah said to him: "Do not make your heart like a sponge soaking up all of these things, because some of these things may never come out of your heart, and even if they do come out, they will leave their taint." What Ibn Taymiyah meant by this statement is that it should not be a person's general practice to bring up false ideas and then look for a way to refute them. Nor should we be teaching young students and new Muslims that this person is astray and that person is a deviant, or that this is a mistake and that is a falsehood. What we need to be teaching them is the truth in its pristine purity as it is found in the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah*. If it happens that this person is exposed to some deviant idea or is likely to be exposed to it, then we should clarify the issue to him in a sound and appropriate manner.

We can be certain that a person who knows the correct Islamic beliefs from the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah* in their pure and unambiguous form – in the same way that the first generation of Muslims had received them – and holds these beliefs in his heart with reverence and love until he dies will find salvation by Allah's grace, even though he never heard of the such groups as the *Ashâ`irah*, the *Mu`tazilah*, the *Jabriyyah*, the *Qadariyyah*, the *Jahmiyyah*, or the *Mu`attalah*.

We can also be certain that Abû Bakr, `Umar, and the rest of the Companions knew nothing of these false doctrines, since such teachings did not exist during their lifetimes.

Example Two: Islamic beliefs come from the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah* and are not tied to any individual. Quite the contrary, people take pride in being associated with those beliefs. Take a noteworthy scholar – *Shaykh al-Islâm* Ibn Taymiyah. He become renowned and famous and achieved a high status only because he did not advocate a particular ideology nor his own personal opinion or reasoning. Instead, he called the people to the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah*. This is all that he came with. He brought nothing from himself. He only turned the people's attention to the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah*, and this is how he earned the title *Shaykh al-Islâm*. The issue with us is not Ibn Taymiyah himself. Our issue is that of correct Islamic beliefs. Everyone who met Ibn Taymiyah loved him and everyone who

read his books held them in high esteem. At the same time, why would I want to make the issue of Ibn Taymiyah himself a point of contention between me and you?

Example Three: The mission of Sheikh Muhammad b. `Abd al-Wahhâb has been quite successfully maligned by the colonial powers both within and outside of the Muslim world. Consequently, he has been accused of the most horrible things, not only by the enemies of Islam and the common people, but also by some people who are regarded as having Islamic knowledge or are engaged in Islamic work.

We do not need here to refute these empty accusations. All we need to do is advise people to read his book entitled *Kitâb al-Tawhîd* (The Book of Monotheism). This is not a case of conflicting evidence. The truth is clear and falsehood is incoherent. His book does not contain claims to prophethood, sainthood, or even of independent juristic reasoning.

Let us look at what the book contains. He starts each chapter with a chapter heading. Then he mentions the relevant verses of *Qur'ân*. Then he presents the *hadîth* of Allah's Messenger, often from *Sahîh al-Bukhârî*. Then he mentions a number of issues addressed by this evidence. This is the approach that he takes throughout the book. The sheikh did not come with anything from himself. He only called to the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah* and to the Oneness of Allah that the Prophets and Messengers came with. This is how he became a renewer of Islam for his time and had a major impact both within the Arabian Peninsula and throughout the world. This all points to the fact that Muhammad b. `Abd al-Wahhâb did not call people to himself, nor to some ideology of his own manufacture. He called to none other than the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah*.

The issue at hand is not whether or not we are Wahhâbîs. We do not call ourselves by this name. If someone tries to deride us with this name, then we should say what a poet once said:

The slanderers deride me that I love her
This is an accusation whose shame is clearly from you.

We must emphasize that you do not have to raise the Wahhâbî banner in any country of the world when you call people to Islam and to the correct application of the faith. Instead, you must raise the banner of the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah*. In the same way, you do not have to correct the people's perception of Muhammad b. `Abd al-Wahhâb, because that will come as a natural consequence of their correctly understanding monotheism. Let us imagine that someone dies who thinks ill of Muhammad b. `Abd al-Wahhâb because of the malicious and false rumors that he had heard during his life. Yet, if this person's beliefs had been correct, then he should attain salvation by Allah's grace, though he held this opinion about Muhammad b. `Abd al-Wahhâb. If, however, he had died on false beliefs, then that would have been a serious problem, especially if such beliefs were so deviant that they took him outside the fold of Islam.

The issue of appearances should never be our first concern. Our primary concern must be with beliefs, and these must be taken directly from the words of Allah and the words of His Messenger. In this way, correct beliefs can become an influential and important part of people's lives. Islamic beliefs should become the guiding spirit for their hearts and their activities, great and small, because these beliefs are the most fundamental concepts that everything else ultimately refers back to. Conversely, as long as there is deficiency in belief, then it is not surprising to find that there will be a lot of negative consequences surfacing in secondary matters. When beliefs are corrupted, then it is not surprising to find people circumambulating tombs, calling on saints, and readily allying themselves with disbelievers and polytheists. Allah says: "Those in whose hearts is a disease – you see how eagerly they run amongst them, saying: 'We do fear lest a change of fortune bring us disaster.' Ah! Perhaps Allah will give victory or a decision according to His Will, and they will feel regret for the thoughts that they secretly harbored in their hearts." [*Sûrah al-Mâ'idah*: 52]

When the beliefs of the people are corrupted, then it is no surprise that we find them giving to others the obedience due only to Allah, and conceding to other human beings the exclusive and divine right of Allah to determine what is lawful and unlawful and to declare what is true and what is false. Allah says:

"What! Have they partners (in divinity) who have established for them some religion without the permission of Allah?" [*Sûrah al-Shûrâ*: 21]

"They take their priests and monks to be their lords instead of Allah, and Christ, the son of Mary; yet they were commanded to worship but One God. There is no god but He. Far glorified is He above the partners that they ascribe to Him." [*Sûrah al-Tawbah*: 31]

"They have no protector other than Him, nor does He share His command with any person whatsoever. And recite what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. None can change His words, and none will you find as a refuge other than Him." [*Sûrah al-Kahf*: 26-27]

"The command is for none but Allah. He has commanded that you worship none but him." [*Sûrah Yûsuf*: 40]

Allah is the Law, the Lawgiver, and the All-Wise. The decree is His alone. He is the only one Who can make things lawful and forbidden. Only Allah has the right to say: "This is lawful and this is prohibited." No human ruler, lawmaker, or politician may claim the right to interfere in anything of the sort. If he were to do so, he would effectively be saying that he shares with Allah in His divinity. Ibn Kathîr writes in his historical work *al-Bidâyah wa al-Nihâyah* (The Beginning and the End): "Whoever abandons the Law that was sent down to Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Seal of the Prophets, and seeks legal redress from the abrogated manifestations of the Law, then that person has fallen into unbelief. How should we then consider someone who seeks out legal judgments from the legal code of Genghis Khan and prefers such judgments to Islamic Law? Whosoever does that is an unbeliever according to the consensus of all Muslims.

CHAPTER TWO
Examples and Cases

In this chapter, we will present some examples – but by no means an exhaustive list of them – to illustrate that we as Muslims really do busy ourselves with particulars at the expense of fundamentals and to show how badly we need to reconsider this approach of ours.

Let us take a look at the following:

I. Focusing on means instead of objectives:

Sometimes we place too much emphasis on our approaches to things at the expense of our objectives. We can go so far as to become heedless or forgetful of our objectives due to our preoccupation with the means. We can find many examples of this behavior.

In the domain of scholarly pursuits:

1. **Hadîth sciences:** We often find the student of *hadîth* paying a lot of attention to the subject of *hadîth* terminology (*mustalah al-hadîth*). He studies it, memorizes short treatises on it, and speaks about narrators. He may expend great efforts on this topic and go to extremes in doing so. Then if you went to him and asked him whether a particular *hadîth* were authentic or weak, he would not be able to tell you, in spite of the fact that he studied *hadîth* terminology day and night. There is no question that the subject of *hadîth* terminology deals with topics of great importance that are indispensable to a student of *hadîth*. At the same time, there are also topics of secondary importance – like the issue of parents relating *hadîth* from their children, senior scholars relating the *hadîth* of junior ones, some particulars issues related to the chain of narrators, and the activity of collecting a number of authorizations (*ijâzât*) from teachers and scholars – topics which are usually not beneficial to the student who studies them or have such limited benefit that a student who preoccupies himself with them at the expense of other things ends up cheating himself.
2. **Islamic Law and jurisprudence:** You can find some students who spend all their efforts on Islamic jurisprudence and legal theory, who delve into the particulars of many intricate questions and acquire a proficiency in the subject and a sound acquaintanceship with both the published literature in the field and with the older manuscripts. This is, in and of itself, a good thing. But at the same time, if you were to ask many of them about a well known verdict in Islamic Law, their only answer would be: “Allah knows best. Ask the experts on Law.” What, then, is the point of studying Islamic jurisprudence – which is but a means of ascertaining the Law from the legal proofs – when you never use it?
3. **Recitation of Qur’ân:** Some of our young people show great interest in the recitation of *Qur’ân* (*tajwîd*) and proper pronunciation of Arabic letters, sometimes exaggerating their pronunciation in the process. Allah’s religion is

easy and poses no undue hardship. There is no excuse for exaggerating things and making them difficult, especially if it forces a wedge between people and the recitation of the *Qur'ân*. Sometimes a person exaggerates the pronunciation of certain letters until their sounds becomes strange. A person may emphasize this subject of study to the extent that he neglects learning the meaning of the *Qur'ân* or its commentary. He fails to act upon the teachings of the *Qur'ân* or call others to them. There is nothing wrong with studying how to perfect your recitation and improve your pronunciation so that you do not confuse one letter with another. All of this is good and a certain amount of attention must be given to these matters. However, sufficient information on this topic may be taken from a booklet no more than twenty pages in length. Overdoing it and drawing the subject out is merely making things difficult.

Obsession with procedure:

We know that the procedures and regulations that have been set down to keep the affairs of people in order are set down for their benefit. This is the reason why rules and procedures are set down in the first place. Therefore, the most important thing is realizing the intended benefits. Sometimes, though, you find a person who is a strict literalist, who pays attention to every minute procedural detail while forgetting the general purposes behind them. In this way, he sabotages the very purpose for which the procedures were set down – for the benefit of the Muslims.

Why should we focus all of our attention on minute particulars and forget the purpose behind them?

Preoccupation with the methods of Islamic work:

People easily become preoccupied with how to do Islamic work and engage in lengthy discussions with each other about it – but often fail to get around to actually doing any Islamic work. How many arguments have flared up about the issue of acting. I have gotten hold of around seven books on this topic, and there are probably a lot of others that I do not know about. The arguments surrounding the permissibility of acting in Islamic Law have become bitter and fierce. There is an equally grim argument being carried out regarding the issue of singing.

We have become distracted from Islamic work by some of the possible ways of carrying it out. Our concern should not be to produce actors and singers, but to call people to the teachings of Islam. Busying ourselves with these various ways and means and arguing for or against them almost always has a negative effect on Islamic work. Our goal is to call people to Allah, and any means of achieving this goal that is not clearly opposed to the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah* should be treated as permissible. This is what a person should assume unless clear evidence to the contrary comes to light. It is important not to become distracted from our goals by being overly concerned about the ways we might achieve them.

II. Focusing on the past instead of the present:

A lot of arguments ensue trying to establish whether some event in history actually took place. Take, for instance, the issue of arbitration between `Alî and Mu`âwiyah (may Allah be pleased with them both). There have been many arguments about this issue and many books have been written about it. People argue, lecture, debate, and haggle about it, though it is a historical event that is over and done with. The people involved did what they did and now their cases are before their Lord who knows what is visible and what is hidden. "And your Lord wrongs no one." [*Sûrah al-Kahf*: 49] What is done is done. Yet, we are still obsessed with this issue. We research it day in and day out. It is not just an academic pursuit that is kept within reasonable parameters. It can often develop into something very grave, a crisis that almost cannot be abated.

While, on the one hand, there is excessive, exaggerated concern for historical accuracy in certain issues, on the other we often find ourselves ignorant about the current events that we as Muslims are actually living through. Muslims are facing serious problems all over the world. They are being punished and tortured. They are being kept ignorant and led astray. They are falling into unbelief, sin, and heresy. They are being converted from the religion that was sent with Muhammad (peace be upon him) and made to join other faiths for which Allah has given no authority. We find our people completely and utterly ignorant of this reality.

Somebody might show great interest in a certain historical event and try to establish what did and did not actually happen. Sometimes we carry historical conflicts over into the present day. We allow them to affect us, polarize us, and spur us on, in spite of the fact that they are not part of our belief system. Disagreements about our beliefs are serious disagreements, but despite the fact that most historical conflicts have nothing to do with beliefs, they remain a part of our lives, often causing serious conflicts between us.

III. Preoccupation with things that do not exist:

How many people talk about the issue of slavery and the legal rulings that are associated with it, like the minimum dress a slave girl must wear? Sometimes these discussions can get very drawn out. Where are the slave girls and where is slavery in the world today? These things are nonexistent today. If slavery does exist somewhere in the world, then it is an extremely rare thing. So then, why busy ourselves with such a topic?

Then there is the preoccupation with hypothetical questions that have only the slimmest chance of ever coming to pass. If these things do ever occur, then there will definitely be people who will be able to deal with them at that time. In spite of this, we find that some people are preoccupied with these issues. Someone has written a very thick book about issues related to Islamic Law. One of the issues that he dealt with extensively was the possibility of a person living on another planet. He discussed how he would purify himself and how he would determine the direction of prayer. He also discussed the implications of a woman falling pregnant and giving birth on another planet. Now, do we really want to remain the laughingstock of nations until the end of time? We drone on

about imaginary problems as if we are incapable of confronting and solving the problems of the real world. Is this how some of us try to show their superiority over others and flex their intellectual muscles? Yet, in this way, we are like people trying to mill the air or plow the sea.

IV. Focusing on issues of lesser importance when there are more pressing matters at hand:

If there are five matters of equal importance that need to be dealt with, then we should give each of these matters the same amount of concern. If, though, one of these matters is more important, then we should give it more attention. In spite of this fact, we find some people preoccupying themselves with a certain issue at the expense of other matters that are no less important. Let us look at a few examples of this:

Accepting payment for teaching *Qur'ân*:

We can sit for long hours arguing about whether or not it is permissible to take a salary for teaching *Qur'ân*. Instead of arguing, we could be establishing foundations, organizations, and teaching programs. We could expend our efforts in starting courses for the memorization of *Qur'ân*. We could offer courses for students of the *Qur'ân* and for Islamic work, even if we must pay the teachers a salary. This is according to the opinion that such a thing is allowed. If someone believes that it is not permissible to do so, then he has the right not to participate. So why, then, do we go on and on about this minor issue and abandon the things that can actually produce important, positive results?

Muslims receiving assistance:

In some countries, Muslims are practically starving to death. Some might not even find a mosque to pray in or a school in which to teach their children. Then, when these people receive some assistance from a non-Muslim agency, the big debate begins: is it permissible or impermissible to accept gifts and assistance from polytheists. Consequently, we must return such assistance to be on the safe side and avoid falling into what is forbidden. In this way, the Muslims miss out on a lot of good.

Distribution of *Zakâh*:

Allah has made eight types of people entitled to receive *Zakâh*. Still, many Muslims have a tendency to place all of their attention on one type to the exclusion of others. For instance, some people like to give all their *Zakâh* to those fighting "… in the cause of Allah." [*Sûrah al-Tawbah*: 60] In this Way, a Muslim has denied many of the rightful recipients of *Zakâh* from their share. In some cases, he might have been able to give his *Zakâh* to someone who was more entitled to receive it, but he did not do so because some idea has taken hold of his mind and caused him to forget all the other types of people who are worthy of receiving *Zakâh*.

V. Using methods that are forbidden by Islamic Law:

Islam has enjoined upon us the activity of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Among its goals are the protection of society, its morals, its safety, its stability, and its religion. The religion has set down a number of legitimate ways of realizing these goals. Still, some people resort to unlawful means to bring these things about, burdening themselves with methods that neither Allah nor His Messenger (peace be upon him) have permitted. An example of this is the use of phone tapping and other forms of surveillance to learn the secrets of people and to find out what goes on within their homes. Such behavior is degrading to human dignity. These means are not permitted by Islamic Law. Islamic Law does not recognize them as a way to prevent wrongdoing. If you see something wrong, then put it right. If, on the other hand, something is hidden from your view or your knowledge and needs you to resort to spying or eavesdropping to expose it, then you are not to concern yourself with it.

Another example of this kind of behavior is being overly concerned with criticizing others. This is a serious affliction, because a person who makes it his habit to criticize others is only trying to retain perfection for himself and deny any distinction for others. A person who has his own serious deficiencies often becomes obsessed with the deficiencies of others and finds a great deal of pleasure and happiness in criticizing other people.

It is the same degree of pleasure that a just person finds when extolling the virtues of those who are worthy. Praise and extolment have their own vocabulary that is defined by Islamic Law, words such as: faith, righteousness, Islam, piety, devotion, obedience, striving, and assistance. People who possess these traits deserve to be praised. Censure, likewise has its own vocabulary: like sin, hypocrisy, disbelief, error, oppression, outrage, transgression, and licentiousness. People who possess such traits deserve to be reproached. One’s personal feelings and attitudes should not be the basis of praise and condemnation, because praise and censure are issues of Islamic Law and consequently must have their basis in the *Qur’ân* and *Sunnah*. Yet, you can find a group of people who seem to have a passion for criticizing others – often targeting those who are known for their knowledge and those who are engaged in Islamic work – who follow their minutest shortcomings and are extremely proficient in publicizing them. This type of person is like a fly that only lands on open wounds.

VI. Overemphasizing the importance of certain issues:

We can present a number of examples that clearly illustrate this phenomenon:

Political analysis:

Political analysis is something that Muslims need in order to understand the world in which they live and in which they want to play a leading role. In order to be able to judge whether the activities of the people are correct or incorrect, just or unjust, a person needs to know the reality of the situation he is talking about. It does not matter whether the

situation in question pertains to an individual or to society, or whether it is of individual, national, or global importance. This is something obvious that needs no discussion. Therefore, knowledge of political events and the ability to correctly relate them to each other is clearly important.

Occasionally, though, for some people this activity evolves into a type of disease. If a mule falls over in the remotest country on Earth, they must tie that event into the big picture. They must then produce evidence for their claim and give their analysis. This is how it becomes a disease. Some people get involved in this activity who have no insight or foresight and no depth of understanding, people who are not even able to comprehend political events, let alone analyze them. This is why you can hear political analysis being offered up that would make a child laugh. Whoever speaks about something he knows nothing about comes up with the strangest things.

Zionist conspiracies:

Many people have come to believe that international Jewry has taken over the world. To them, the Jews are the ones who distribute the air that the people breathe, the water that they drink and the food that they eat, as if they are a supernatural entity. This is something that the Jews have succeeded at. They have succeeded in impressing upon the minds of people of all nationalities that they are this terrifying specter. People have become psychologically defeated. Muslims have begun to feel that the Jews can follow them everywhere, that they are a nation that cannot be resisted, and that they are a danger that cannot be repelled – not only in Israel, but everywhere in the world.

When you hear what such people have to say, you will be amazed how they are able to implicate the Jews in every problem and affliction in the world. The best evidence that they can produce for their claims are books like *The Protocols of Zion*; though such books merely make claims as well. As for the proof, it has yet to be provided.

Hidden sects:

A lot is being said about hidden sects today and about the dangers that they pose. No doubt, they are a real danger, especially under our present circumstances. Still, we must put the danger of hidden sects into proper perspective. We should not exaggerate the threat that they pose, because exaggerating the importance of the enemy can lead us to inaction and an unwillingness to confront them. Sometimes they succeed in a way that we do not realize, for when we give an enemy more credit than they deserve, we become distracted from more important matters and from protecting ourselves from other enemies that in reality are more dangerous than they are.

Names:

It is startling how much emphasis we place on naming things. We should ask ourselves: does the great weight that we place on naming our children equal the concern we have for their upbringing? Do we give the same amount of concern to the school that they will

attend and the environment in which we will bring them up? Or, after choosing for your child that beautiful name, do you continue to concern yourself with superficial matters, like nice clothes and amusing toys? Then, do you invite your child to watch some cartoons or some other vacuous, corruptive media so that it can raise your children for you and assume the important role of developing the child's mind, psychological health, and spirit?

Let us return to the issue of naming. We can see the great care that is taken in the naming of cities, streets, universities, and schools. We have no objection to this, as long as the names are good, appropriate, and representative, names that give expression to our heritage and our history and show our identification with it. The problem arises when the only thing that matters to us is appearances. When the issue of the school curriculum or university syllabus comes up, it turns out that we could not care less. Not even the professors and the students care. This is where the problem starts. We do not object to our paying attention to this or that. Be concerned with selecting a good name *and* be concerned with what goes behind that good name: a good curriculum, a good upbringing, a good professor, and a good preparation for the students that guarantees their success in this life and the next. Unfortunately, what often happens is the opposite. We find the most resounding names being given to the most paltry and trivial things. As a poet of old once said:

Among the things that make me disdain the land of Andalusia
Are the names it contains of great kings – Mu`tamad and Mu`tadid

Names for a kingdom where no kingdom is,
Like a housecat boastfully recounting a lion's attack.

Unending preoccupation with secondary issues:

There are a group of questions that we students of knowledge invariably bring up in our discussions when we meet together. One of these is whether or not a person should rest seated for a moment in prayer after making the two prostrations and before standing to begin the next unit of prayer. We ask whether it preferable, disliked, forbidden, or obligatory. Another question is whether or not we should move our fingers in prayer during the tashahhud. Books and treatises have been written on the subject. People have disagreed on how to move their fingers and even mastered different ways of doing so. Another question is where the hands should be placed in prayer – on the chest, below the navel, or above the navel. Then there is the question of whether a person should put his knees or his hands on the ground first when prostrating in prayer. There is the issue of praying with sandals on. There is the question of the face veil for women. There is the issue of whether to use the fingers of the right hand or of both hands when engaging in the remembrance of Allah. We ask about the number of units of prayer in the *Tarâwîh* prayer. We ask whether we should make our remembrances audibly or silently after we finish prayer.

These and many other minor questions have become our primary concern and our primary topic of conversation. It has become so that every student of knowledge who wishes to test his abilities will pick some of these questions and drone on incessantly about them. Some people have gone so far as to make these questions the criterion by which to judge whether someone follows the *Sunnah* or not.

There is nothing wrong with clarifying these issues. We only object to making issues like these our only concern and our only topic of discussion when we meet. For some of us, these issues have become the only things occupying our minds and filling our hearts. How long are we to go around in circles about issues like these and neglect our major concerns: matters of belief, our contemporary life, our scientific backwardness, our economic backwardness, and our search for a way to place the Islamic nation on a secure footing? For how long must these serious concerns be put on hold while we busy ourselves with minor issues and details?

Transaction law is being completely neglected. Students of Islamic Law are generally only concerned with a few questions regarding worship, in spite of the fact that issues of worship are clear. They are addressed by direct and unambiguous texts and are not open to juristic reasoning. This is not the case with transaction law. There is an incalculable number of new issues coming up all the time. Referring these things back to the basic principles set down by Islamic Law requires a deep understanding and intimate knowledge of the Law that most of those who engage in the field are lacking. This is why, when they turn their hands to these issues, their true proficiency becomes clear.

There is a lot of exaggeration and excess in dealing with some matters. There is a tendency to blow certain issues out of proportion. When some Islamic workers and preachers want to warn the people against something that is not actually forbidden, they resort to mentioning all the evils that can come of it, sometimes coming up with over twenty or thirty evil consequences. They do all of this just so they can tell the people that they should avoid something. Instead of telling the people that it is unlawful – because they do not have any clear proof that it is – they prohibit the people from engaging in it without clearly stating that it is forbidden. The problem arises in the mind of the one receiving the admonition. When he hears this kind of speech, he perceives that the matter is very grave and serious, because of all of its harmful consequences, its evil effects for society, and negative effects that it has for the individual and his devotions. In the listener's mind, the issue has become a major sin. What would have been better was to say to him something that would discourage him from doing the undesired action without exaggerating its importance, something like: "It would be better to avoid this thing" or "It is a doubtful matter."

This is why a scholar of jurisprudence once observed: "I find that the general public is more zealous about issues of Islamic Law than the scholars are." The reason for this is that a scholar who gives legal verdicts knows the issues and all the opinions and proofs that surround them. He knows the evidence for each opinion, and he knows who held it among the Companions, the Successors, and the leading jurists. On this basis, he gives preference to one opinion while being fully aware that other legitimate opinions exist that

are also supported by evidence. Because of this, he does not state his opinion forcefully, nor does he become overzealous about it, nor does he overreact. On the other hand, we have a novice student or an average Muslim who receives this verdict from the scholar without having the proofs of the other opinions mentioned to him and without the issue being placed in a proper and objective framework. His heart becomes filled with the verdict and he sees it as if it is the religion itself. He becomes zealous about the legal opinion that he receives from the scholar and combative with anyone who disagrees with it, even if the one who disagrees with him is capable of juristic reasoning and might possibly be the one holding the correct opinion.

This behavior also gives the general public the impression that these Islamic workers and students of knowledge are superficial people with restricted vision, whose thoughts and discussions are restricted to a narrow spectrum of issues.

It is easy for us to correct a number of minor and secondary issues, but it is difficult to tackle the major ones. We should be focusing our attentions on these more important, fundamental issues, because the subsidiary matters fall into place when the major, fundamental problems are corrected. This in no way detracts from the importance of correcting the subsidiary matters. The Prophets who were sent to their people used to call them to monotheism and at the same time call them to matters of lesser importance. Allah relates to us the words of Shu`ayb: “O my people, worship Allah: You have no other gods but Him. And give not short measure or weight.” [*Sûrah Hûd*: 84] Yet, without doubt, concern for the fundamentals is more important. It is the starting point for all other reform.

CHAPTER THREE
Solutions

1. Scholars and Islamic workers must place their activities on a solid foundation:

It is not permissible for every scholar and Islamic worker to go forward on his own without there being any concern for establishing principles, guidelines, points of departure, and a clear methodology for Islamic work. The same goes for the activities of seeking and imparting knowledge. Those young people have been entrusted to us. It is our duty to prepare the correct way for them.

2. Correct religious awareness must be disseminated amongst the Muslims:

This religion has come to take charge of all aspects of life. It did not come merely as a set of beliefs to remain hidden in the heart, existing only as a personal relationship between you and Allah. It did not come merely as an act of worship for you to perform in the mosque and then have you give unto Caesar what is unto Caesar and give unto God what is unto God. It did not come to take charge of certain aspects of life and leave the rest to the wiles of false gods. It came expressly to take charge of all aspects of life, major and minor, from the time of birth to the time of death. “Say: Verily my prayer, my sacrifice, my life, and my death are for Allah, the Lord of All the Worlds.” [*Sûrah al-An`âm*: 162]

This concept must be made clear to the people so that they will understand that Islam takes charge of all affairs, great and small, without exception. Allah says:

“O you who believe, enter into Islam wholeheartedly.” [*Sûrah al-Baqarah*: 208]

“I have only created Jinn and humanity that they may worship me. No sustenance do I require from them, nor do I require that they should feed me. For Allah is the Provider, the Owner of Power, the Mighty.” [*Sûrah al-Dhâriyât*: 56-58]

3. Scholars and Islamic workers must be accessible to the people for their questions:

Meetings and programs should be held where people have the opportunity to present whatever questions and problems that they have for the scholars and Islamic workers to answer. We should mention here, though, that most of the questions that the people ask are about secondary matters of Islamic Law. There is nothing wrong with this, since it is everyone’s duty to ask about the matters of religion that concern him.

Still, where are the questions about Islamic beliefs? Where are the questions about the current tragic state of the Muslims and how we might lift ourselves out of it? Where are the questions that seek to enlighten the Muslims about the suffering that their brothers all over the world are enduring? Where are the questions about how we can overcome the ever increasing crises that the Muslims today are living through? Where are the questions pertaining to how we can revitalize an Islamic approach to our economics, our media, our politics, our administration, our press, our literature, and all our other fields of endeavor? These questions are conspicuously absent, because we are so preoccupied with minor details. We always ask about those secondary matters that concern us and never go beyond them to ask about the more relevant and pressing issues that are out there.

All of us share the responsibility for this state of affairs. Teachers, administrators, jurists, scholars, and Islamic workers are especially responsible. If these important questions go unanswered – because they were never posed in the first place or because somehow they never reached the proper ears – then it is the responsibility of these people to pose these questions themselves, answer them, and teach the public what they need to know about these matters in accordance with Islamic law. Allah says:

“Nothing have We omitted from the Book.” [*Sûrah al-An`âm*: 38]

“And We have sent down to you the Book, explaining all things.” [*Sûrah al-Nahl*: 89]

4. A general policy should be set down for writing and publishing:

This applies to both books and Islamic cassettes. Islamic bookstores and publishing houses are filled with material. Yet, what types of works are they publishing? What types of cassettes are being distributed?

You can find dozens of cassettes discussing the same minor issue. Some of these cassettes are embarrassing and we can only hope that our opposition never gets a chance to hear them. If they do, they will find a profitable opportunity to fight against us just by publicizing these cassettes, because they interfere with the minutest details of people's lives in matters not addressed by the *Qur'ân* and *Sunnah* nor by the people of knowledge. Often, the ideas presented are but individual impressions and personal opinions. It is as if these people are saying: "Do this and don't do that. We worship Allah alone so nobody else has the right to tell us anything."

Therefore, some sort of guidelines should be set down for the publication and distribution of books and cassettes. There is nothing wrong with publishing a cassette, book, or other form of media that adheres to a set of clear and sensible conditions, works that Islamic workers will be happy to have in circulation and that will be of benefit to the Muslims.

5. There is a need for a broad spectrum of fully developed Islamic media:

Islamic media is needed that will put people on the right track and cultivate a mature, Islamic frame of mind. We need media that will counteract the falsehoods and the numerous misconceptions that the false media produces, like the idea that religion should be restricted to certain aspects of life and the depiction of religious people and Islamic workers in a most ugly and degrading manner. This is why it is of utmost importance for us to create for ourselves a fully-developed and comprehensive media industry.

CONCLUSION

Allah knows the sorrow and distress that afflicts our hearts while we see no recourse except to dwell on minor issues at the expense of major ones. In spite of this, we have total confidence that Allah will do for the Islamic nation what it is incapable of doing for itself. Allah will provide for it circumstances that will make it mature, develop its thinking, purify its heart, and straighten out its priorities.

When a person is completely taken by some issue or another to the point of obsession, he cannot conceive of the world except in the light of that issue. If someone, then, were to say to him that he has gone overboard on the matter, he would of course consider that person as someone steeped in error, because that matter is his only concern. It is the matter upon which he developed his worldview and it is therefore extremely difficult for him to turn away from it to some broader and greater perspective.

There is, though, one way that such a person can be forced out of the state that he is in, and this is to be confronted with circumstances and events so great that they force him to think about what is going on. Among these are the events that are confronting the Muslims on account of their enemies, the historical challenges that have occurred in the past, the challenges being faced today, and the ones that will confront us in the future; events that inflame the feelings of the people, incite them, and move them. This person has no choice but to respond to these events. These events tear him away from the narrow reality in which he lives and force him to confront the real world as it is.

We ask Allah to show to us the points of weakness within ourselves and to guide us to a proper understanding of our circumstances. We ask Him to make us sincere to Him, seeking only His Countenance, asking for nothing except what is with Him, and hoping for nothing but His pleasure. And may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family, and his Companions.

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